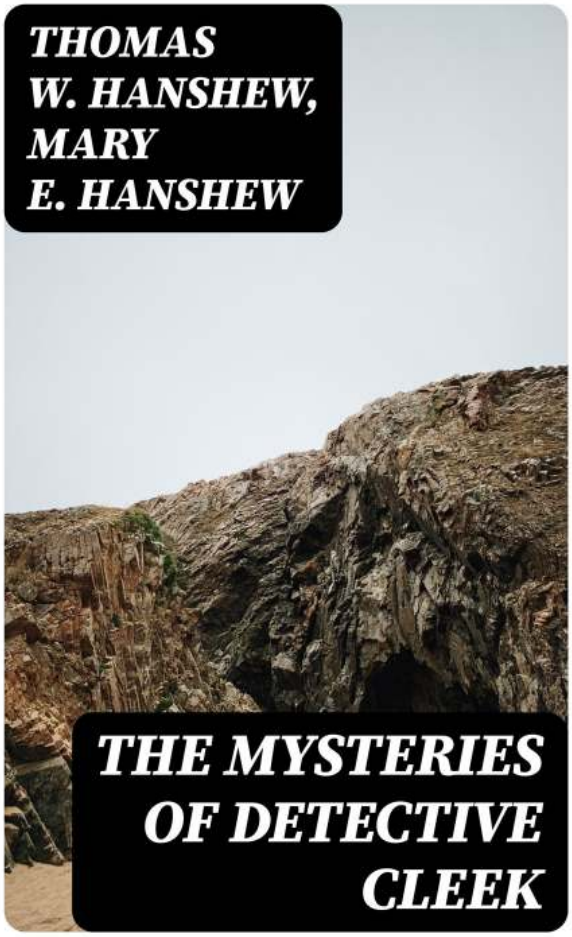
THOMAS
W. HANSHEW,
MARY
E. HANSHEW
THE MYSTERIES
OF DETECTIVE
CLEEK

**Thomas W. Hanshew, Mary E. Hanshew**

# The Mysteries of Detective Cleek

EAN 8596547396673

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

# Table of Contents

# Cleek, the Master Detective; or The Man of the Forty Faces (1910)

Table of Contents

# CHAPTER I
# THE AFFAIR OF THE MAN WHO CALLED HIMSELF HAMILTON CLEEK

Table of Contents

I
II
III

# I

Table of Contents

The thing wouldn't have happened if any other constable than Collins had been put on point duty at Blackfriars Bridge that morning. For Collins was young, good-looking, and knew it. Nature had gifted him with a susceptible heart and a fond eye for the beauties of femininity. So when he looked round and saw the woman threading her way through the maze of vehicles at "Dead Man's Corner," with her skirt held up just enough to show two twinkling little feet in French shoes, and over them a graceful, willowy figure, and over that an enchanting, if rather too highly tinted, face, with almond eyes and a fluff of shining hair under the screen of a big Parisian hat—that did for him on the spot.

He saw at a glance that she was French—exceedingly French—and he preferred English beauty, as a rule. But, French or English, beauty is beauty, and here undeniably was a perfect type, so he unhesitatingly sprang to her assistance and piloted her safely to the kerb, revelling in her voluble thanks and tingling as she clung timidly but rather firmly to him.

"Sair, I have to give you much gratitude," she said in a pretty, wistful sort of way, as they stepped on to the pavement. Then she dropped her hand from his sleeve, looked up at him, and shyly drooped her head, as if overcome with confusion and surprise at the youth and good looks of him. "Ah, it is nowhere in the world but Londres one finds these delicate attentions, these splendid sergeants de ville," she added, with a sort of sigh. "You are wonnerful, you are mos' wonnerful, you Anglais poliss. Sair, I am a stranger; I know not ze ways of this city of

amazement, and if monsieur would so kindly direct me where to find the Abbey of the Ves'minster——"

Before P. C. Collins could tell her that if that were her destination, she was a good deal out of her latitude, indeed, even before she concluded what she was saying, over the rumble of the traffic there rose a thin, shrill, piping sound, which to ears trained to its call possessed a startling significance.

It was the shrilling of a police whistle far off down the Embankment.

"Hullo! That's a call to the man on point," exclaimed Collins, all alert at once. "Excuse me, mum. See you presently. Something's up. One of my mates is a-signalling me."

"Mates, monsieur? Mates? Signalling? I shall not unnerstand the vords. But yes, vat shall that mean—eh?"

"Good Lord, don't bother me now! I—I mean, wait a bit. That's the call to 'head off' some one, and—— By George! there he is now, coming head on, the hound, and running like the wind!"

For of a sudden, through a break in the traffic, a scudding figure had sprung into sight. It was the figure of a man in a gray frock-coat and a shining "topper," a well-groomed, well-set-up man, with a small, turned-up moustache and hair of a peculiar reddish shade. As he swung into sight, the distant whistle shrilled again; far off in the distance voices sent up cries of "Head him off!" "Stop that man!" etcetera; then those on the pavement near to the fugitive took up the cry, joined in pursuit, and in a twinkling, what with cabmen, tram-men, draymen, and pedestrians all shouting, there was hubbub enough for Hades.

"A swell pickpocket, I'll lay my life," commented Collins, as he squared himself for an encounter and made ready to leap on the man when he came within gripping distance. "Here! get out of the way, madmazelly. Business before pleasure. And, besides, you're like to get bowled over in the

rush. Here, chauffeur!"—this to the driver of a big, black motor-car which swept round the angle of the bridge at that moment, and made as though to scud down the Embankment into the thick of the chase—"pull that thing up sharp! Stop where you are! Dead still! At once, at once, do you hear? We don't want you getting in the way. Now, then"—nodding his head in the direction of the running man—"come on, you bounder; I'm ready for you!"

And, as if he really heard that invitation, and really were eager to accept it, the red-headed man did "come on" with a vengeance. And all the time, "madmazelly," unheeding Collins's advice, stood calmly and silently waiting.

Onward came the runner, with the whole roaring pack in his wake, dodging in and out among the vehicles, "flooring" people who got in his way, scudding, dodging, leaping, like a fox hard pressed by the hounds, until, all of a moment, he spied a break in the traffic, leapt through it, and—then there was mischief. For Collins sprang at him like a cat, gripped two big, strong-as-iron hands on his shoulders, and had him tight and fast.

"Got you, you ass!" snapped he, with a short, crisp, self-satisfied laugh. "None of your blessed squirming now. Keep still. You'll get out of your coffin, you bounder, as soon as out of my grip. Got you, got you! Do you understand?"

The response to this fairly took the wind out of him.

"Of course I do," said the captive gaily; "it's part of the programme that you should get me. Only, for Heaven's sake, don't spoil the film by remaining inactive, you goat! Struggle with me, handle me roughly, throw me about. Make it look real; make it look as though I actually did get away from you, not as though you let me. You chaps behind there, don't get in the way of the camera—it's in one of those cabs. Now, then, Bobby, don't be wooden! Struggle, struggle, you goat, and save the film!"

"Save the what?" gasped Collins. "Here! Good Lord! Do you mean to say——?"

"Struggle—struggle—struggle!" cut in the man impatiently. "Can't you grasp the situation? It's a put-up thing: the taking of a kinematograph film, a living picture, for the Alhambra to-night! Heavens above, Marguerite, didn't you tell him?"

"Non, non! There was not ze time. You come so quick, I could not. And he—ah, le bon Dieu!—he gif me no chance. Officair, I beg, I entreat of you, make it real! Struggle, fight, keep on ze constant move. Zere!"—something tinkled on the pavement with the unmistakable sound of gold—"zere, monsieur, zere is de half-sovereign to pay you for ze trouble, only, for ze lof of goodness, do not pick it up while the instrument, ze camera, he is going. It is ze kinematograph, and you would spoil everything!"

The chop-fallen cry that Collins gave was lost in a roar of laughter from the pursuing crowd.

"Struggle, struggle! Don't you hear, you idiot?" broke in the red-headed man irritably. "You are being devilishly well paid for it, so for goodness' sake make it look real. That's it! Bully boy! Now, once more to the right, then loosen your grip so that I can push you away and make a feint of punching you off. All ready there, Marguerite? Keep a clear space about her, gentlemen. Ready with the motor, chauffeur? All right. Now, then, Bobby, fall back, and mind your eye when I hit out, old chap. One, two, three—here goes!"

With that he pushed the crest-fallen Collins from him, made a feint of punching his head as he reeled back, then sprang toward the spot where the Frenchwoman stood, and gave a finish to the adventure that was highly dramatic and decidedly theatrical. For "mademoiselle," seeing him approach her, struck a pose, threw out her arms, gathered him into them, to the exceeding enjoyment of the laughing throng, then both looked back and behaved as people do on the stage when "pursued," gesticulated extravagantly, and rushing to the waiting motor, jumped into it.

"Many thanks, Bobby; many thanks, everybody!" sang out the red-headed man. "Let her go, chauffeur. The camera men will pick us up again at Whitehall in a few minutes' time."

"Right you are, sir," responded the chauffeur gaily. Then "toot-toot" went the motor-horn as the gentleman in gray closed the door upon himself and his companion, and the vehicle, darting forward, sped down the Embankment in the exact direction whence the man himself had originally come, and, passing directly through that belated portion of the hurrying crowd to whom the end of the adventure was not yet known, flew on and—vanished.

And Collins, stooping to pick up the half-sovereign that had been thrown him, felt that after all it was a poor price to receive for all the jeers and gibes of the assembled onlookers.

"Smart capture, Bobby, wasn't it?" sang out a deriding voice that set the crowd jeering anew. "You'll git promoted, you will! See it in all the evenin' papers—oh, yus! ''Orrible hand-to-hand struggle with a desperado. Brave constable has 'arf a quid's worth out of an infuriated ruffian!' My hat! won't your missis be proud when you take her to see that bloomin' film?"

"Move on, now, move on!" said Collins, recovering his dignity and asserting it with a vim. "Look here, cabby, I don't take it kind of you to laugh like that; they had you just as bad as they had me. Blow that Frenchy! She might have tipped me off before I made such an ass of myself. I don't say that I'd have done it so natural if I had known, but—— Hullo! What's that? Blowed if it ain't that blessed whistle again, and another crowd a-pelting this way; and—no!—yes, by Jupiter! a couple of Scotland Yard chaps with 'em. My hat! what do you suppose that means?"

He knew in the next moment. Panting and puffing, a crowd at their heels, and people from all sides stringing out from the pavement and trooping after them, the two "plain-

clothes" men came racing through the grinning gathering and bore down on P. C. Collins.

"Hullo, Smathers, you in this, too?" began he, his feelings softened by the knowledge that other arms of the law would figure on that film with him at the Alhambra to-night. "Now, what are you after, you goat? That French lady, or the red-headed party in the gray suit?"

"Yes, yes, of course I am. You heard me signal you to head him off, didn't you?" replied Smathers, looking round and growing suddenly excited when he realized that Collins was empty-handed and that the red-headed man was not there. "Heavens! you never let him get away, did you? You grabbed him, didn't you—eh?"

"Of course I grabbed him. Come out of it. What are you giving me, you josser?" said Collins, with a wink and a grin. "Ain't you found out even yet, you silly? Why, it was only a faked-up thing, the taking of a kinematograph picture for the Alhambra. You and Petrie ought to have been here sooner and got your wages, you goats. I got half a quid for my share when I let him go."

Smathers and Petrie lifted up their voices in one despairing howl.

"When you what?" fairly yelled Smathers. "You fool! You don't mean to tell me that you let them take you in like that—those two? You don't mean to tell me that you had him, had him in your hands, and then let him go? You did? Oh, you seventy-seven kinds of a double-barrelled ass! Had him—think of it!—had him, and let him go! Did yourself out of a share in a reward of two hundred quid when you'd only to shut your hands and hold on to it!"

"Two hundred quid? Two hun—— W—what are you talking about? Wasn't it true? Wasn't it a kinematograph picture, after all?"

"No, you fool, no!" howled Smathers, fairly dancing with despair. "Oh, you blithering idiot! You ninety-seven varieties of a fool! Do you know who you had in your hands? Do you

know who you let go? It was that devil 'Forty Faces,' the 'Vanishing Cracksman,' 'The Man Who Calls Himself Hamilton Cleek'; and the woman was his pal, his confederate, his blessed stool pigeon, 'Margot, the Queen of the Apaches'; and she came over from Paris to help him in that clean scoop of Lady Dresmer's jewels last week!"

"Heavens!" gulped Collins, too far gone to say anything else, too deeply dejected to think of anything but that he had had the man for whom Scotland Yard had been groping for a year; the man over whom all England, all France, all Germany wondered, close shut in the grip of his hands and then had let him go. He was the biggest and the boldest criminal the police had ever had to cope with, the almost supernatural genius of crime, who defied all systems, laughed at all laws, mocked at all the Vidocqs, and Lupins, and Sherlock Holmeses, whether amateur or professional, French or English, German or American, that ever had or ever could be pitted against him, and who, for sheer devilry, for diabolical ingenuity, and for colossal impudence, as well as for a nature-bestowed power that was simply amazing, had not his match in all the universe.

Who or what he really was, whence he came, whether he was English, Irish, French, German, Yankee, Canadian, Italian, or Dutchman, no man knew and no man might ever hope to know unless he himself chose to reveal it. In his many encounters with the police he had assumed the speech, the characteristics, and, indeed, the facial attributes of each in turn, and assumed them with an ease and a perfection that were simply marvellous and had gained for him the sobriquet of "Forty Faces" among the police and of the "Vanishing Cracksman" among the scribes and reporters of newspaperdom. That he came in time to possess another name than these was due to his own whim and caprice, his own bald, unblushing impudence; for, of a sudden, whilst London was in a fever of excitement and all the newspapers up in arms over one of his most daring and successful

coups, he chose to write boldly to both editors and police complaining that the title given him by each was both vulgar and cheap.

"You would not think of calling a great violinist like Paganini a 'fiddler,'" he wrote; "why, then, should you degrade me with the coarse term of 'cracksman'? I claim to be as much an artist in my profession as Paganini was in his, and I claim also a like courtesy from you. So, then, if in the future it becomes necessary to allude to me, and I fear it often will, I shall be obliged if you do so as 'The Man Who Calls Himself Hamilton Cleek.' In return for the courtesy, gentlemen, I promise to alter my mode of procedure, to turn over a new leaf, as it were, to give you at all times hereafter distinct information, in advance, of such places as I select for the field of my operations, and of the time when I shall pay my respects to them, and, on the morning after each such visit, to bestow some small portion of the loot upon Scotland Yard as a souvenir of the event."

And to that remarkable programme he rigidly adhered from that time forth, always giving the police twelve hours' notice, always evading their traps and snares, always carrying out his plans in spite of them, and always, on the morning after, sending some trinket or trifle to Superintendent Narkom at Scotland Yard. This trifle would be in a little pink cardboard box, tied up with rose-coloured ribbon, and marked, "With the compliments of The Man Who Calls Himself Hamilton Cleek."

The detectives of the United Kingdom, the detectives of the Continent, the detectives of America—each and all had measured swords with him, tried wits with him, spread snares and laid traps for him, and each and all had retired from the field vanquished.

And this was the man that he, Police Constable Samuel James Collins, had actually had in his hands, nay, in his very arms, and then had given up for half a sovereign and let go!

"Oh, so help me! You make my head swim, Smathers, that you do!" he managed to say at last. "I had him—I had the Vanishing Cracksman in my blessed paws and then went and let that French hussy—— But look here; I say, now, how do you know it was him? Nobody can go by his looks; so how do you know?"

"Know, you footler!" growled Smathers disgustedly. "Why shouldn't I know when I've been after him ever since he left Scotland Yard half an hour ago?"

"Left what? My hat! You ain't a-going to tell me that he's been there? When? Why? What for?"

"To leave one of his blessed notices, the dare-devil. What a detective he'd 'a' made, wouldn't he, if he'd only a-turned his attention that way, and been on the side of the law instead of against it? He walked in bold as brass, sat down and talked with the superintendent over some cock-and-bull yarn about a 'Black Hand' letter that he said had been sent to him, and asked if he couldn't have police protection whilst he was in town. It wasn't until after he'd left that the superintendent he sees a note on the chair where the blighter had been sitting, and when he opened it, there it was in black and white, something like this:

"The list of presents that have been sent for the wedding to-morrow of Sir Horace Wyvern's eldest daughter make interesting reading, particularly that part which describes the jewels sent—no doubt as a tribute to her father's position as the greatest brain specialist in the world—from the Austrian Court and the Continental principalities. The care of such gems is too great a responsibility for the bride. I propose, therefore, to relieve her of it to-night, and to send you the customary souvenir of the event to-morrow morning. Yours faithfully,

"The Man Who Calls Himself Hamilton Cleek.

"That's how I know, dash you! Superintendent sent me out after him, hot foot; and after a bit I picked him up in the Strand, toddling along with that French hussy as cool as you please. But, blow him! he must have eyes all round his head, for he saw me just as soon as I saw him, and he and Frenchy separated like a shot. She hopped into a taxi and flew off in one direction; he dived into the crowd and bolted in another, and before you could say Jack Robinson he was doubling and twisting, jumping into cabs and jumping out again—all to gain time, of course, for the woman to do what he'd put her up to doing—and leading me the devil's own chase through the devil's own tangles till he was ready to bunk for the Embankment. And you let him go, you blooming footler! Had him and let him go, and chucked away a third of £200 for the price of half a quid!"

And long after Smathers and Petrie had left him, the wondering crowd had dispersed, and point duty at "Dead Man's Corner" was just point duty again and nothing more, P. C. Collins stood there, chewing the cud of bitter reflection over those words and trying to reckon up just how many pounds and how much glory had been lost to him.

# II

Table of Contents

"But, damme, sir, the thing's an outrage! I don't mince my words, Mr. Narkom. I say plump and plain the thing's an outrage, a disgrace to the police, an indignity upon the community at large; and for Scotland Yard to permit itself to be defied, bamboozled, mocked at in this appalling fashion by a paltry burglar——"

"Uncle, dear, pray don't excite yourself in this manner. I am quite sure that if Mr. Narkom could prevent the things ——"

"Hold your tongue, Ailsa. I will not be interfered with! It's time that somebody spoke out plainly and let this establishment know what the public has a right to expect of it. What do I pay my rates and taxes for—and devilish high ones they are, too, b'gad—if it's not to maintain law and order and the proper protection of property? And to have the whole blessed country terrorized, the police defied, and people's houses invaded with impunity by a gutter-bred brute of a cracksman is nothing short of a scandal and a shame! Call this sort of tomfoolery being protected by the police? God bless my soul! one might as well be in the charge of a parcel of doddering old women and be done with it!"

It was an hour and a half after that exciting affair at "Dead Man's Corner." The scene was Superintendent Narkom's private room at headquarters, the dramatis personæ, Mr. Maverick Narkom himself, Sir Horace Wyvern, and Miss Ailsa Lorne, his niece, a slight, fair-haired, extremely attractive girl of twenty. She was the only and orphaned daughter of a much-loved sister, who, up till a year ago, had known nothing more exciting in the way of

"life" than that which is to be found in a small village in Suffolk and falls to the lot of an underpaid vicar's only child. A railway accident had suddenly deprived her of both parents, throwing her wholly upon her own resources without a penny in the world. Sir Horace had gracefully come to the rescue and given her a home and a refuge, being doubly repaid for it by the affection and care she gave him and the manner in which she assumed control of a household which, hitherto, had been left wholly to the attention of servants. Lady Wyvern had long been dead, and her two daughters were of that type which devotes itself entirely to the pleasures of society and the demands of the world. A regular pepperbox of a man, testy, short-tempered, exacting, Sir Horace had flown headlong to Superintendent Narkom's office as soon as that gentleman's note, telling him of The Vanishing Cracksman's latest threat, had been delivered, and, on Miss Lorne's advice, had withheld all news of it from the members of his household, and brought her with him.

"I tell you that Scotland Yard must do something—must! must! must!" stormed he as Narkom, resenting that stigma upon the institution, puckered up his lips and looked savage. "That fellow has always kept his word, always, in spite of your precious band of muffs, and if you let him keep it this time, when there's upward of £40,000 worth of jewels in the house, it will be nothing less than a national disgrace, and you and your wretched collection of bunglers will be covered with deserved ridicule."

Narkom swung round, smarting under these continued taunts, these "flings" at the efficiency of his prided department, his nostrils dilated, his temper strained to the breaking-point.

"Well, he won't keep it this time—I promise you that!" he rapped out sharply. "Sooner or later every criminal, no matter how clever, meets his Waterloo, and this shall be his! I'll take this affair in hand myself, Sir Horace. I'll not only

send the pick of my men to guard the jewels, but I'll go with them; and if that fellow crosses the threshold of Wyvern House to-night, by the Lord, I'll have him. He will have to be the devil himself to get away from me! Miss Lorne," recollecting himself and bowing apologetically, "I ask your pardon for this strong language—my temper got the better of my manners."

"It does not matter, Mr. Narkom, so that you preserve my cousin's wedding gifts from that appalling man," she answered, with a gentle inclination of the head and with a smile that made the superintendent think she must certainly be the most beautiful creature in all the world, it so irradiated her face and added to the magic of her glorious eyes. "It does not matter what you say, what you do, so long as you accomplish that."

"And I will accomplish it, as I'm a living man, I will! You may go home feeling assured of that. Look for my men some time before dusk, Sir Horace. I will arrive later. They will come in one at a time. See that they are admitted by the area door, and that, once in, not one of them leaves the house again before I put in an appearance. I'll look them over when I arrive to be sure that there's no wolf in sheep's clothing amongst them. With a fellow like that, a diabolical rascal with a diabolical gift for impersonation, one can't be too careful. Meantime, it is just as well not to have confided this news to your daughters, who, naturally, would be nervous and upset; but I assume that you have taken some one of the servants into your confidence, in order that nobody may pass them and enter the house under any pretext whatsoever?"

"No, I have not. Miss Lorne advised against it, and, as I am always guided by her, I said nothing of the matter to anybody."

"Was that wrong, do you think, Mr. Narkom?" queried Ailsa anxiously. "I feared that if they knew they might lose their heads, and that my cousins, who are intensely nervous

and highly emotional, might hear of it, and add to our difficulties by becoming hysterical and demanding our attention at a time when we ought to be giving every moment to watching for the possible arrival of that man. And as he has always lived up to the strict letter of his dreadful promises heretofore, I knew that he was not to be expected before nightfall. Besides, the jewels are locked up in the safe in Sir Horace's consulting-room, and his assistant, Mr. Merfroy, has promised not to leave the room for one instant before we return."

"Oh, well, that's all right, then. I dare say there is very little likelihood of our man getting in whilst you and Sir Horace are here, and taking such a risk as stopping in the house until nightfall to begin his operations. Still, it was hardly wise, and I should advise hurrying back as fast as possible and taking at least one servant—the one you feel least likely to lose his head—into your confidence, Sir Horace, and putting him on the watch for my men. Otherwise, keep the matter as quiet as you have done, and look for me about nine o'clock. And rely upon this as a certainty: The Vanishing Cracksman will never get away with even one of those jewels if he enters that house to-night, and never get out of it unshackled!"

With that, he suavely bowed his visitors out and rang up the pick of his men without an instant's delay.

Promptly at nine o'clock he arrived, as he had promised, at Wyvern House, and was shown into Sir Horace's consulting-room, where Sir Horace himself and Miss Lorne were awaiting him and keeping close watch before the locked door of a communicating apartment in which sat the six men who had preceded him. He went in and put them all and severally through a rigid examination in quest of any trace of "make-up" or disguise of any sort, examining their badges and the marks on the handcuffs they carried with them to make sure that they bore the sign which he himself

had scratched upon them in the privacy of his own room a couple of hours ago.

"No mistake about this lot," he announced, with a smile. "Has anybody else entered or attempted to enter the house?"

"Not a soul," replied Miss Lorne. "I didn't trust anybody to do the watching, Mr. Narkom. I watched myself."

"Good. Where are the jewels? In that safe?"

"No," replied Sir Horace. "They are to be exhibited in the picture gallery for the benefit of the guests at the wedding breakfast to-morrow, and as Miss Wyvern wished to superintend the arrangement of them herself, and there would be no time for that in the morning, she and her sister are in there laying them out at this moment. As I could not prevent that without telling them what we have to dread, I did not protest against it; but if you think it will be safer to return them to the safe after my daughters have gone to bed, Mr. Narkom——"

"Not at all necessary. If our man gets in, their lying there in full view like that will prove a tempting bait, and—well, he'll find there's a hook behind it. I shall be there waiting for him. Now go and join the ladies, you and Miss Lorne, and act as though nothing out of the common was in the wind. My men and I will stop here, and you had better put out the light and lock us in, so that there's no danger of anybody finding out that we are here. No doubt Miss Wyvern and her sister will go to bed earlier than usual on this particular occasion. Let them do so. Send the servants to bed, too. You and Miss Lorne go to your beds at the same time as the others—or, at least, let them think that you have done so; then come down and let us out."

To this Sir Horace assented, and, taking Miss Lorne with him, went at once to the picture gallery and joined his daughters, with whom they remained until eleven o'clock. Promptly at that hour, however, the house was locked up, the bride-elect and her sister went to bed, the servants

having already gone to theirs, and stillness settled down over the darkened house. At the end of a dozen minutes, however, it was faintly disturbed by the sound of slippered feet coming along the passage outside the consulting-room, then a key slipped into the lock, the door was opened, the light switched on, and Sir Horace and Miss Lorne appeared before the eager watchers.

"Now, then, lively, my men, look sharp!" whispered Narkom. "A man to each window and each staircase, so that nobody may go up or down or in or out without dropping into the arms of one of you. Confine your attention to this particular floor, and if you hear anybody coming, lay low until he's within reach, and you can drop on him before he bolts. Is this the door of the picture gallery, Sir Horace?"

"Yes," answered Sir Horace, as he fitted a key to the lock. "But surely you will need more men than you have brought, Mr. Narkom, if it is your intention to guard every window individually, for there are four to this room—see!"

With that he swung open the door, switched on the electric light, and Narkom fairly blinked at the dazzling sight that confronted him. Three long tables, laden with crystal and silver, cut glass and jewels, and running the full length of the room, flashed and scintillated under the glare of the electric bulbs which encircled the cornice of the gallery and clustered in luminous splendour in the crystal and frosted silver of a huge central chandelier. Spread out on the middle one of these, a dazzle of splintered rainbows, a very plain of living light, lay caskets and cases, boxes and trays, containing those royal gifts of which the newspapers had made so much and the Vanishing Cracksman had sworn to make so few.

Mr. Narkom went over and stood beside the glittering mass, resting his hand against the table and feasting his eyes upon all that opulent splendour.

"God bless my soul! it's superb, it's amazing," he commented. "No wonder the fellow is willing to take risks for

a prize like this. You are a splendid temptation, a gorgeous bait, you beauties; but the fish that snaps at you will find that there's a nasty hook underneath in the shape of Maverick Narkom. Never mind the many windows, Sir Horace. Let him come in by them, if that's his plan. I'll never leave these things for one instant between now and the morning. Good-night, Miss Lorne. Go to bed and to sleep. You do the same, Sir Horace. My 'lay' is here!"

With that he stooped and, lifting the long drapery which covered the table and swept down in heavy folds to the floor, crept out of sight under it, and let it drop back into place again.

"Switch off the light and go," he called to them in a low-sunk voice. "Don't worry yourselves, either of you. Go to bed, and to sleep if you can."

"As if we could," answered Miss Lorne agitatedly. "I shan't be able to close an eyelid. I'll try, of course, but I know I shall not succeed. Come, uncle, come! Oh, do be careful, Mr. Narkom; and if that horrible man does come——"

"I'll have him, so help me God!" he vowed. "Switch off the light, and shut the door as you go out. This is 'Forty Faces.' Waterloo at last."

And in another moment the light snicked out, the door closed, and he was alone in the silent room.

For ten or a dozen minutes not even the bare suggestion of a noise disturbed the absolute stillness; then, of a sudden, his trained ear caught a faint sound that made him suck in his breath and rise on his elbow, the better to listen. The sound came, not from without the house, but from within, from the dark hall where he had stationed his men. As he listened he was conscious that some living creature had approached the door, touched the handle, and by the swift, low rustle and the sound of hard breathing, that it had been pounced upon and seized. He scrambled out from beneath the table, snicked on the light, whirled open the door, and was in time to hear the irritable voice of Sir

Horace say, testily, "Don't make an ass of yourself by your over-zealousness. I've only come down to have a word with Mr. Narkom," and to see him standing on the threshold, grotesque in a baggy suit of striped pyjamas, with one wrist enclosed as in a steel band by the gripped fingers of Petrie.

"Why didn't you say it was you, sir?" exclaimed that crestfallen individual, as the flashing light made manifest his mistake. "When I heard you first, and see you come up out of that back passage, I made sure it was him; and if you'd a-struggled, I'd have bashed your head as sure as eggs."

"Thank you for nothing," he responded testily. "You might have remembered, however, that the man's first got to get into the place before he can come downstairs. Mr. Narkom," turning to the superintendent, "I was just getting into bed when I thought of something I'd neglected to tell you; and as my niece is sitting in her room with the door open, and I wasn't anxious to parade myself before her in my night clothes, I came down by the back staircase. I don't know how in the world I came to overlook it, but I think you ought to know that there's a way of getting into the picture gallery without using either the windows or the stairs, and that way ought to be both searched and guarded."

"Where is it? What is it? Why in the world didn't you tell me in the first place?" exclaimed Narkom irritably, as he glanced round the place searchingly. "Is it a panel? a secret door? or what? This is an old house, and old houses are sometimes a very nest of such things."

"Happily, this one isn't. It's a modern innovation, not an ancient relic, that offers the means of entrance in this case. A Yankee occupied this house before I bought it from him, one of those blessed shivery individuals his country breeds, who can't stand a breath of cold air indoors after the passing of the autumn. The wretched man put one of those wretched American inflictions, a hot-air furnace, in the cellar, with huge pipes running to every room in the house, great tin monstrosities bigger round than a man's body,

ending in openings in the wall, with what they call 'registers' to let the heat in or shut it out as they please. I didn't have the wretched contrivance removed or those blessed 'registers' plastered up. I simply had them papered over when the rooms were done up (there's one over there near that settee), and if a man got into this house, he could get into that furnace thing and hide in one of those flues until he got ready to crawl up it as easily as not. It struck me that perhaps it would be as well for you to examine that furnace and those flues before matters go any further."

"Of course it would. Great Scott! Sir Horace, why didn't you think to tell me of this thing before?" said Narkom excitedly. "The fellow may be in it at this minute. Come, show me the wretched thing."

"It's in the cellar. We shall have to go down the kitchen stairs, and I haven't a light."

"Here's one," said Petrie, unhitching a bull's-eye from his belt and putting it into Narkom's hand. "Better go with Sir Horace at once, sir. Leave the door of the gallery open and the light on. Fish and me will stand guard over the stuff till you come back, so in case the man is in one of them flues and tries to bolt out at this end, we can nab him before he can get to the windows."

"A good idea," commented Narkom. "Come on, Sir Horace. Is this the way?"

"Yes, but you'll have to tread carefully, and mind you don't fall over anything. A good deal of my paraphernalia—bottles, retorts, and the like—is stored in the little recess at the foot of the staircase, and my assistant is careless and leaves things lying about."

Evidently the caution was necessary, for a minute or so after they had disappeared behind the door leading to the kitchen stairway, Petrie and his colleagues heard a sound as of something being overturned and smashed, and laughed softly to themselves. Evidently, too, the danger of the furnace had been grossly exaggerated by Sir Horace, for

when, a few minutes later, the door opened and closed, and Narkom's men, glancing toward it, saw the figure of their chief reappear, it was plain that he was in no good temper. His features were knotted up into a scowl, and he swore audibly as he snapped the shutter over the bull's-eye and handed it back to Petrie.

"Nothing worth looking into, superintendent?"

"No, not a thing!" he replied. "The silly old josser! pulling me down there amongst the coals and rubbish for an insane idea like that! Why, the flues wouldn't admit the passage of a child; and, even then, there's a bend, an abrupt 'elbow,' that nothing but a cat could crawl up. And that's a man who's an authority on the human brain! I sent the old silly back to bed by the way he came, and if——"

There he stopped, stopped short, and sucked in his breath with a sharp, wheezing sound. For, of a sudden, a swift pattering footfall and a glimmer of moving light had sprung into being and drawn his eyes upward. There, overhead, was Miss Lorne coming down the stairs from the upper floor in a state of nervous excitement, with a bedroom candle in her shaking hand, a loose gown flung on over her nightdress, and her hair streaming over her shoulders in glorious disarray.

He stood and looked at her, with ever-quickening breath, with ever-widening eyes, as though the beauty of her had wakened some dormant sense whose existence he had never suspected, as though, until now, he had never known how fair it was possible for a woman to be, how much to be desired. And whilst he was so looking she reached the foot of the staircase and came pantingly toward him.

"Oh, Mr. Narkom, what was it—that noise I heard?" she said in a tone of deepest agitation. "It sounded like a struggle, like the noise of something breaking, and I dressed as hastily as I could and came down. Did he come? Has he been here? Have you caught him? Oh! why don't you answer me, instead of staring at me like this? Can't you see

how nervous, how frightened I am? Dear Heaven! will no one tell me what has happened?"

"Nothing has happened, Miss," answered Petrie, catching her eye as she flashed round on him. "You'd better go back to bed. Nobody's been here but Sir Horace. The noise you heard was me a-grabbing of him, and he and Mr. Narkom a-tumbling over something as they went down to look at the furnace."

"Furnace? What furnace? What are you talking about?" she cried agitatedly. "What do you mean by saying that Sir Horace came down?"

"Only what the superintendent himself will tell you, Miss, if you ask him. Sir Horace came downstairs in his pyjamas a few minutes ago to say as he'd recollected about the flues of the furnace in the cellar being big enough to hold a man, and then him and Mr. Narkom went below to have a look at it."

She gave a sharp and sudden cry, and her face went as pale as a dead face.

"Sir Horace came down?" she repeated, moving back a step and leaning heavily against the banister. "Sir Horace came down to look at the furnace? We have no furnace!"

"What?"

"We have no furnace, I tell you, and Sir Horace did not come down. He is up there still. I know, because I feared for his safety, and when he went to his room I locked him in!"

"Superintendent!" The word was voiced by every man present and six pairs of eyes turned toward Narkom with a look of despairing comprehension.

"Get to the cellar. Head the man off! It's he, the Cracksman!" he shouted out. "Find him! Get him! Nab him, if you have to turn the house upside down!"

They needed no second bidding, for each man grasped the situation instantly, and in a twinkling there was a veritable pandemonium. Shouting and scrambling like a band of madmen, they lurched to the door, whirled it open,

and went flying down the staircase to the kitchen and so to a discovery which none might have foreseen. For almost as they entered they saw lying on the floor a suit of striped pyjamas, and close to it, gagged, bound, helpless, trussed up like a goose that was ready for the oven, gyves on his wrists, gyves on his ankles, their chief, their superintendent, Mr. Maverick Narkom, in a state of collapse and with all his outer clothing gone!

"After him! After that devil, and a thousand pounds to the man that gets him!" he managed to gasp as they rushed to him and ripped loose the gag. "He was here when we came! He has been in the house for hours. Get him! get him! get him!"

They surged from the room and up the stairs like a pack of stampeded animals; they raced through the hall and bore down on the picture gallery in a body, and, whirling open the now closed door, went tumbling headlong in.

The light was still burning. At the far end of the room a window was wide open, and the curtains of it fluttered in the wind. A collection of empty cases and caskets lay on the middle table, but man and jewels were alike gone! Once again the Vanishing Cracksman had lived up to his promise, up to his reputation, up to the very letter of his name, and for all Mr. Maverick Narkom's care and shrewdness, "Forty Faces" had "turned the trick," and Scotland Yard was "done!"

# III

Table of Contents

Through all the night its best men sought him, its dragnets fished for him, its tentacles groped into every hole and corner of London in quest of him, but sought and fished and groped in vain. They might as well have hoped to find last summer's partridges or last winter's snow as any trace of him. He had vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared, and no royal jewels graced the display of Miss Wyvern's wedding gifts on the morrow.

But it was fruitful of other "gifts," fruitful of an even greater surprise, that "morrow." For the first time since the day he had given his promise, no "souvenir" from "The Man Who Called Himself Hamilton Cleek," no part of last night's loot came to Scotland Yard; and it was while the evening papers were making screaming "copy" and glaring headlines out of this that the surprise in question came to pass.

Miss Wyvern's wedding was over, the day and the bride had gone, and it was half-past ten at night, when Sir Horace, answering a hurry call from headquarters, drove post haste to Superintendent Narkom's private room, and, passing in under a red-and-green lamp which burned over the doorway, met that "surprise."

Maverick Narkom was there alone, standing beside his desk. The curtains of his window were drawn and pinned together, and at his elbow was an unlighted lamp of violet-coloured glass. Narkom turned as his visitor entered and made an open-handed gesture toward something which lay before him.

"Look here," he said laconically, "what do you think of this?"

Sir Horace moved forward and looked; then stopped and gave a sort of wondering cry. The electric bulbs overhead struck a glare of light on the surface of the desk, and there, spread out on the shining oak, lay a part of the royal jewels that had been stolen from Wyvern House last night.

"Narkom! You got him then, got him after all?"

"No, I did not get him. I doubt if any man could, if he chose not to be found," said Narkom bitterly. "I did not recover these jewels by any act of my own. He sent them to me; gave them up voluntarily."

"Gave them up? After he had risked so much to get them? God bless my soul, what a man! Why, there must be quite half here of what he took."

"There is half—an even half. He sent them to-night, and with them this letter. Look at it, and you will understand why I sent for you and asked you to come alone."

Sir Horace read:

There's some good in even the devil, I suppose, if one but knows how to reach it and stir it up.

I have lived a life of crime from my very boyhood because I couldn't help it, because it appealed to me, because I glory in risks and revel in dangers. I never knew, I never thought, never cared, where it would lead me, but I looked into the gateway of heaven last night, and I can't go down the path to hell any longer. Here is an even half of Miss Wyvern's jewels. If you and her father would have me hand over the other half to you, and would have The Vanishing Cracksman disappear forever, and a useless life converted into a useful one, you have only to say so to make it an accomplished thing. All I ask in return is your word of honour (to be given to me by signal) that you will send for Sir Horace Wyvern to be at your office at eleven o'clock to-night, and that you and he will grant me a private interview unknown to any other living being. A red-and-green lantern hung over the doorway leading to your office

will be the signal that you agree, and a violet light in your window will be the pledge of Sir Horace Wyvern. When these two signals, these two pledges, are given, I shall come in and hand over the remainder of the jewels, and you will have looked for the first time in your life upon the real face of The Man Who Calls Himself Hamilton Cleek.

"God bless my soul! what an amazing creature, what an astounding request!" exclaimed Sir Horace, as he laid the letter down. "Willing to give up £20,000 worth of jewels for the mere sake of a private interview! What on earth can be his object? And why should he include me?"

"I don't know," said Narkom in reply. "It's worth something, at all events, to be rid of 'The Vanishing Cracksman' for good and all; and he says that it rests with us to do that. It's close to eleven now. Shall we give him the pledge he asks, Sir Horace? My signal is already hung out; shall we agree to the conditions and give him yours?"

"Yes, yes, by all means," Sir Horace made answer. And, lighting the violet lamp, Narkom flicked open the pinned curtains and set it in the window.

For ten minutes nothing came of it, and the two men, talking in whispers while they waited, began to grow nervous. Then somewhere in the distance a clock started striking eleven, and, without so much as a warning sound, the door flashed open, flashed shut again, a voice that was undeniably the voice of breeding and refinement said quietly, "Gentlemen, my compliments. Here are the diamonds and here am I!" and the figure of a man, faultlessly dressed, faultlessly mannered, and with the clear-cut features of the born aristocrat, stood in the room.

His age might lie anywhere between twenty-five and thirty-five, his eyes were straight looking and clear, his fresh, clean-shaven face was undeniably handsome, and, whatever his origin, whatever his history, there was